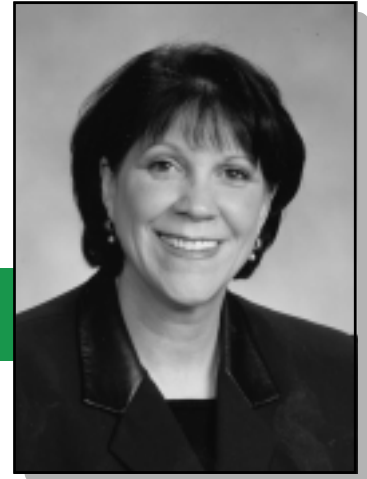


Representative

Jeannie DARNEILLE

27th District

2004 Session Report



Dear Neighbors,

The New Year means a fresh beginning for the Legislature, as we reconvene in Olympia to carry on the state's business in the 2004 Legislative Session.

This is a short session – only 60 days – but there's a lot of work to do, and a lot of bills that can greatly enhance our quality of life for years to come.

Last session we spent a great deal of time and effort creating the best business climate possible for companies like Boeing. I was pleased to see Boeing recognize the great strides forward our state has made and decide to build its 7E7 Dreamliner jet here.

That spirit of cooperation and creativity within the Legislature and among our fellow citizens helped land that project. I expect to see that same spirit this session, as we continue down the path towards economic recovery.

Most importantly, we must work on building a strong economy by creating good-paying jobs, investing in education, and improving accessibility and affordability of health care.

All of these issues are intertwined. I will be working hard these 60 days to make sure we give our children, our unemployed workers, and our neediest families the attention they deserve.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature of Jeannie Darneille in green ink, written over a light green background.

Jeannie Darneille
State Representative
27th Legislative District



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Washington CARES

In tough economic times, the need for state services increases tremendously, as more and more rely on unemployment benefits, public education, and health programs. When the economy suffers, our citizens suffer as well; we witness increased domestic violence, homelessness, and other problems. This only prolongs our economic downturns. It is my belief that we have to give people security in their lives and their homes in order to make the economy work for everyone.

I am honored to be named the Chair of a newly-created Democratic caucus task force, Washington CARES – an acronym that defines its role; Compassion, Accountability, Reform, and Economic Security. It is essentially a workgroup of democratic legislators committed to reinventing the way we deliver services to children, low-income families, under-represented demographic groups, and vulnerable individuals.

Washington CARES will focus on improving the ability of our state's families and individuals to gain economic security, meet their basic needs, and protect vulnerable individuals.

- Improving the economic security of Washington's families and individuals so they can meet their basic needs.
- Ensuring services for families and individuals are accountable, efficient, effective
- Emphasizing long-term cost savings for programs and services.
- Making health care more affordable by reducing health care premiums for kids on Medicaid
- Making sure mental health care is offered with health plans
- Paying home care workers a living wage and ensuring they have benefits
- Expanding job training programs so that everyone in Washington can have a good paying job with benefits.

To fix the economy we need to address all of these issues, for they are all intertwined. We need to ask ourselves: What's the cost to children, working people and seniors if we don't address these needs? We can't expect a hungry, sick or neglected child to succeed in school and achieve a good-paying job. We can't expect unemployed workers to gain the skills they need to acquire a new job without some assistance. And we can't expect to keep the cost of health care and insurance down if we deny preventative medicine to some.

Members of the Washington CARES task force have spent their time away from the Legislature developing a package of bills and reforms based partly on input from community stakeholders and grassroots organizations. This was not business as usual; our task was to find innovative approaches that wouldn't break the bank. As the acronym suggests, a heavy emphasis is placed on ensuring that any existing or newly-created services are accountable, efficient, and emphasize long-term cost savings.

Improving Health Care Accessibility

The cost of health care in our country is at alarming levels, forcing many to choose between food or heat or the prescriptions and care we need. For others, it isn't even a matter of choice – health care is just not an option, and that is unacceptable.

Part of our economic recovery will rely on the availability and affordability of health care. It does us no good to increase funding to education if kids are sick, abused, or hungry. We cannot expect them to be successful in school and in life under those conditions.

Some seem to think that when we limit the amount of people on the Basic Health Plan or when we cap the number of individuals who can receive health insurance we are saving money. However, that's just not the case. That creates a burden on our emergency rooms, which can be much more expensive than practicing preventative medicine. That means restoring the cuts made to the Basic Health Plan last year and increasing the amount of low-income families that can receive health care. We cannot climb our way out of recession by leaving some behind.

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Finally, we will continue to work on controlling the outrageous cost of prescription drugs. Making prescription drugs more affordable is critical to improving the quality of care. After years of fighting, we scored a major victory for our families and seniors when we passed a prescription drug reform bill. But we need to build on that success and keep working to improve access to affordable health care for all our citizens.

I will be working on ensuring low-cost prescription drugs for our citizens by allowing their purchase from Canada for a fraction of what they would cost here in the United States. There is no reason why Americans should pay more for the same drug than the citizens of any other country. It will be an uphill battle against a very powerful pharmaceutical lobby, but I believe the fleecing of America's seniors and health care consumers by these hugely profitable companies must end.

Looking for discounts on prescription drugs?

A new toll-free phone number may be able to help.

The Washington State Legislature created the Pharmacy Connections program to help senior citizens and others take advantage of prescription-drug discounts they may be eligible to receive.

The Senior Information and Pharmacy Connections Line is available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. Call **1-888-435-3377**

Further information about the Pharmacy Connections program and Washington state's prescription-drug reforms can be found at: www.rx.wa.gov.

Stopping the Outsourcing Epidemic

Here in Washington, our economy relies on global trade much more than most other states. Consequently, our businesses must compete not only with other Americans, but also with other countries. Some feel the urge to keep costs low by outsourcing their work to countries where wages are lower and there are no protections or benefits for workers.

This "race to the bottom" as it's called isn't just isolated to blue-collar, manufacturing jobs. Almost every industry is now susceptible to loss overseas, from service centers to the high-skilled computer programming and biotech positions that were the driving force behind our region's economic boom of the 90s.

In order to keep Corporate America from becoming Corporate India or China or any other country for that matter, I am supporting a package of bills that will prohibit our state government from contracting jobs out overseas.

State contracts — public works, personal services, information services, and highway design and construction — should be given to citizens of the United States and persons authorized to work in the United States.

Money spent here tends to stay here. We are encouraged to buy locally and we must do what we can to hire locally as well. That means providing a skilled home-grown workforce, a business-friendly climate, and the incentive to keep jobs here in Washington.

Education – An Investment in our Future

Finding jobs won't matter unless we have a world-class education system for our children. Students in Washington should have the best schools and the best teachers.

This year's high school freshmen will be the first class required to pass the state's standards test, the WASL. I do not want to see any children drop out or fail to achieve our standards. However, I do not believe that a single test is always the best method to evaluate a student or a school. Allowing for commonsense changes in the WASL and alternative ways for students to prove they've mastered core subjects will be a crucial part of a seamless system from public school to Higher Education.

The time has also come to allow our schools to pass levies with a simple majority. Currently, a school levy can fail even when it receives 59 percent of the vote from local citizens. That's not right. We shouldn't make it any harder for our schools to receive the support they need.

Another hot topic this session will be Charter Schools. These are publicly financed schools that are independent of most state laws and rules. The contract, or charter, details how the school will be organized and managed,

Representative
Jeannie DARNEILLE

27th District

what students will be taught and expected to achieve, and how success will be measured. Currently, schools funded by taxpayer dollars are governed by elected school boards, and subject to state laws and rules.

As always, this will be a very contentious issue. Some believe that charter schools will be more responsive to the needs of children, especially those that are educationally disadvantaged. Others believe that this just diverts more money away from our public schools at a time when they can least afford it.

Washington Army Guardsmen due to return in late March after having spent nearly 17 months on active duty.



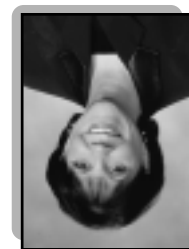
Help for our National Guard Families

Our country has asked more from its military personnel in the past year than it has in decades. It seems we all know someone with a relative in harm's way. My small church is praying for sixteen of our extended family members — including my niece and nephew — currently serving in either Iraq or Afghanistan. We are all well aware of the tremendous sacrifice they and their families make for us.

Unfortunately, many of those same families are now struggling to make ends meet without their primary or secondary source of income. Our members of the National Guard have put their lives on hold and left good-paying jobs at home. Some are now finding it difficult to pay the mortgage or put food on the table. They also may have lost health care benefits, or can no longer afford childcare.

It is therefore my special privilege to introduce two pieces of legislation bringing some relief to the struggling families of our men and women in uniform. One would allow the state to fund a program to provide temporary financial assistance to families of activated national guard members; the other would pay families of activated state employees the differential between their state salaries and their military pay. I strongly applaud the businesses and municipalities that have taken this important step and believe the state should follow their lead.

The call to serve and leave your family creates challenges for those who remain in our communities. We can add these efforts to our respect, concerns, and prayers.



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